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Referring to FIG. 4, instep guard 40 is formed to include hollow channels 56, 58 that absorb shock to the feet without sacrificing comfort. In particular, instep guard 40 includes a first planar sheet 50 and a second planar sheet 52, with curved support members 54 extending between the planar sheets 50, 52 to define elongated hollow channels 56 with circular cross-sections. The channels extend through the instep guard 40, for example, along the axis 43 of the foot. Cross pieces 55 join convex surfaces of adjacent curved members. Each cross piece 55, defines an elongated hollow channels 58 with each planar sheet 50, 52 and the corresponding curved members 54. The hollow channels 58 each have a substantially trapezoidal cross-section. Thus the instep guard 40 defines parallel air-filled channels aligned along the axis 43 of the foot to provide protection from inadvertent blows or forces to the metatarsals of the foot without making the shoe uncomfortable.

In the claims:

Please cancel claims 11-23.

Please amend claims 1 and 4 as follows:

a3
Sub 2
(Amended) Footwear for protecting a foot comprising:
an upper defining an opening, the upper including:
a vamp having a proximal and a distal region;
an instep portion in the vamp to cover a metatarsal section of the foot, the instep portion including a liner positioned beneath the instep portion;
a steel toe positioned on a toe portion of the upper for protecting a toe region of the foot; and
an elastic instep guard positioned between the instep portion and the liner to protect the metatarsal section of the foot, the instep guard including an elastic support having a plurality of hollow passages and extending from the distal region to the proximal region of the vamp which is attached to the toe portion of the steel toe; and
an outsole attached to the upper to define a cavity that receives the foot through the opening. --